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THE LYRE

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•Winner of *The Lyre's Poetry Competition*•

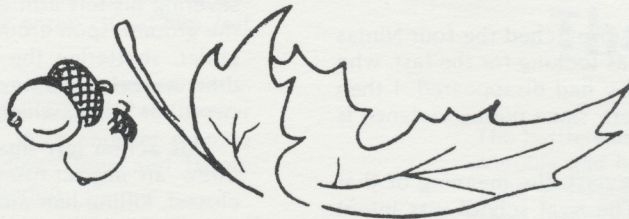
## We Could Roam Again

by Rodrigo Diaz

We could roam again in Living-Eden:  
Where grass sparkles crystalline in the morning;  
Where glow-light pours down on the hills,  
Tipped from Apollo's carafe;  
Where green leaves hum melodies  
As milk-clouds amble through ethereal azure;  
Where stream-drops giggle over our feet  
And tickle our toes;  
Where we need not fear to pluck fruit  
From a darling limb  
Or to let its sweetness trickle down our lips.

Such is sealed in us.  
Like flowers picked from earth,  
Dreams are held in hand,  
Plucked from their birth — to wither:  
Mine is never mine.

In a cold, dark wood  
The sinful huddle against the wind,  
Seeking consolation; but  
Fatherless children have no shoulder to weep on.



## Sonnet for Eden

by Mark Thomas

She fingers the soil with her tools of sin,  
This gift of life has left her without trust.  
An apple was bit, see the life within,  
Its blood is turning on wheels of rust.  
The walls of Eden confine Paradise,  
Leaving her to make her own form of light.  
She cries to her baby, once left her twice,  
She cries through mornings, she cries through the night.  
The mother of man, the daughter of sin,  
Grandmother of faith with dirt on her feet.  
The lymph from the walls rolls on her; within.  
Night crawls inside her; she feels the heat.  
Alas, she is love, contortions ever more  
She will search the walls until she finds the door.

## Autumn

by David Chen

Across the streets a swirl of color flies  
With gusts of brisk, cold wind upon its heels,  
That blow and whistle like a ghost that tries  
To take the summer away and bring the feels  
Of cold and snow and glowing hearths of fire.  
The trees ablaze with russet, gold, and red,  
And earlier sunsets that time inspires  
To happen when the warmth and green have fled.  
All Hallows' Eve, Thanksgiving, and football bring  
Us times of celebration, fun, and joy,  
But books and classes come and school bells ring  
To compensate as payments for the joy.  
The fall it comes in trees and air; then gone,  
Beginning, growing, whisp'ring, fades, like a song.



# HOMECOMING FUN

by Thomas Sodeman



The message was simple and clear. It consisted of a single piece of rice paper with the words "Tonight — Twenty hundred hours" written in black ink. The unsettling part was the fact that it was propped against my steering wheel, even though my car was still locked. Picking a lock is a simple matter, but for someone to actually do it was disquieting in the extreme.

The reason for this odd message was really rather simple. Two days before, I had "interfered" with a group of Ninjas pursuing a victim through Westshore Mall. The results of my civic intervention left two Ninjas sharing six 9-millimeter bullets, another with a broken neck, and a fourth missing his head and arms due to my expert use of the sword. This is because I, too, am a Ninja, but of a different school of Ninjutsu than the aforementioned. The main difference between the two has to do with innocent bystanders. (Read this as: they don't like them.) Thus, there is considerable enmity between the two groups.

Anyway, back to the story. I had dispatched the four Ninjas without even breaking stride and was looking for the last, who was still chasing his victim, but they had disappeared. I then decided that it would be best if I left, since public violence is generally frowned upon.

After this little sidetrack into the past, the meaning of that message should be clear to you. The rival school was intent upon getting revenge for my intrusion into their work, and it was going to happen the night of homecoming.

Because of their disregard for the lives of bystanders, and the fact that there would be plenty to go around, I decided to fake an illness to get out of the halftime show.

Because of the amount of action I was expecting, I had come with a veritable warehouse of weapons. However, some would be a bit cumbersome to lug around with me, so I had hidden the larger ones around the campus earlier that day.

Since I would be rather conspicuous on the ground, I decided to take to the roofs, so that I could travel the campus unnoticed. This would also enable me to surprise anyone on the ground.

Exactly at eight, I saw several black-clad figures moving silently through the campus. I then moved from where I was observing them on the library roof to the lower gym roof, where I had hidden a bow and arrows. I was then able to dispatch four of them in silence without them knowing it. Unfortunately, it

didn't last because one spotted me and alerted the others. I came under a hail of silenced gunfire.

Throwing a grappling hook through a window in the gym, I swung out of their field of fire and into a field of spectators by the concession stand. While being verbally assaulted by a "barf me out!", I noticed three more Ninjas on top of the new field house. Jumping the fence around the track, I ran through a flock of cheerleaders, scattering them, and jumped from the track onto the home stands, over the fence. Running up the stairs by the reserved seats, I then jumped over the rail at the top of the stands.

Although this did seem suicidal, I managed to catch the rail with another grappling hook, and swung beneath the stands. Here I found five more Ninjas, all with swords drawn. I likewise drew mine and blocked the overhead strike of the nearest one, disengaged, and put my weight into a downwards cut, neatly severing his left arm at the shoulder. I grabbed it before it hit the ground, spun around, and deflected another's sword into a girder, shattering the sword. Releasing the ownerless limb, I drew a steel throwing spike and threw it into the left eye of the swordless Ninja, which penetrated his brain, killing him.

This action left three Ninjas alive, but not for long. I then threw an impact-fused magnesium flare at the face of the closest, killing him and blinding the two others. Taking advantage of this, I slipped away towards the campus.

Having leaped back onto the roof of Building Three, I noticed two Ninjas standing with their backs to me, apparently sniping. I could tell this because both had M-79 grenade launchers with phosphorus grenades. Evidently they weren't taking any chances. Drawing a boot knife, I cut the throat of the closest, but unfortunately his struggles alerted his comrade, who swung his launcher around to face me. Switching my grip on the knife, I threw it at his throat. He easily ducked this attack, but wasn't fast enough to block my sword, which split his head like a ripe watermelon.

After picking up one of the launchers, I noticed a group of Ninjas near the Senior Lounge. I then aimed the launcher in their midst and fired, knocking them down. Thinking that they were uninjured, they began to get up to run for cover, but they fell back down again as the phosphorus burned into them.

While I was watching the Ninjas thrash around, I spotted a group of Samurai in the area between the Chapel and the Administration Building.



Dropping the launcher, I retrieved a spear from a rain gutter, where I had hidden it. I then jumped down from the roof and trotted over to the Chapel. Using still another grappling hook, I climbed to the roof and made my way around to the other side. I threw my spear into the midst of the Samurai, and immediately followed it, landing in a roll. I estimated that there were fifteen of them, so I thought that I had better eliminate some before the surprise of my coming wore off.

I stabbed the closest in the chest with the spear, reversed my grip, and brought the butt of the spear down on the head of the one behind me, crushing it. Swinging it to the left, I broke another's arm as he raised his sword to strike. This knocked the sword out of his hands and into the one behind him, killing him. I then fainted at the one beside him, who attempted to slash at my spear but instead hit the Samurai with the broken arm. While he looked at this, I crushed his throat with a well-placed kick, and he died gargling his blood.

By now the remaining ten were ready to attack, so I needed a little help. Thus, I pulled out my Beretta 93-R machine pistol and dispatched six more. I followed this with three shurikens, hitting three more in the throat, killing them. All of this left one very angry Samurai. Dropping the spear, I grabbed two fine swords that their owners no longer needed. I then turned to face him and threw the sword in my left hand, which he ducked. We then closed on each other and executed a flurry of blocks and strikes, none of which connected. I then turned away, as if to run, and he lowered his sword and began to run after me. Instead, I kept spinning, my sword up, and severed his head.

After this I spotted the two remaining Ninjas on the Chapel roof, observing what was going on. Grabbing my spear, I threw it at one and followed it with the swords scattered around the area. While he dodged the spear, he didn't see the swords and was hit in the leg. He then fell off the roof and landed with a crunch. The second, however, dodged the swords.

This remaining Ninja then leaped from the Chapel to the Cafeteria while throwing a shuriken in mid-leap. I dodged this, ran to Building Two, and jumped onto the roof. While under cover, I reloaded my 93-R, all the while reasoning that this last Ninja must be the master of the school, by the way he moved.

I then started moving to where I supposed he was. While on the Administration Building, I saw him pop up beside the Cafeteria. Aiming the 93-R, I emptied the entire clip at him, but he moved so fast I missed him.

I then dropped to the ground to try to circle behind him. Moving to where he had appeared, I saw him slip around the corner of Building Three closest to the Gym. With another running start I jumped onto the roof of Building Three and barely missed being struck by his sword as I landed.

Drawing my sword, I leaped to the side to draw myself out of his range. We then commenced to move around on the roof, studying each other's moves. He then jumped at me and slashed, attempting to throw me off balance. With extreme alacrity I moved to the side, blocking his strike. Unfortunately, I wasn't looking where I was going and fell off the roof.

With this, the master leaped after me, but I was ready for him. When he jumped, I braced my sword against the ground, and he landed on it, shattering the blade but killing him instantly.

After this I beat a hasty retreat because being found covered in blood next to a corpse is not good for one's criminal record. I then removed all of my weapons, changed clothes, and went to see the end of the game.

What do you mean, you don't believe this? I didn't make it up! Well, I may have embellished it a little. Okay, okay, I embellished it a lot. All right, I made the whole thing up. But it was a good story, and it was better than sitting here doing nothing during First Period. ■

## Seconds of Silence

by Tim McKenna

If there's a door  
Out of this room,  
If there's a way  
To release all the gloom,  
It should be joy  
If release is met;  
Frustrations released,  
Anger a regret.

Seconds of silence,  
A minute of your time,  
Is all that is needed  
To last me a lifetime.  
Seconds of silence,  
A minute of your time,  
An adequate chance  
To release these feelings of mine.

The hate and anger has yet to subside.  
I need an outlet.  
I need a guide.  
I want help, to sort out the inside.  
The inside of me,  
Help for my mind.

Chorus

Yet all things aside,  
Don't worry about me.  
There are worse things in life  
Than my mind's debris.

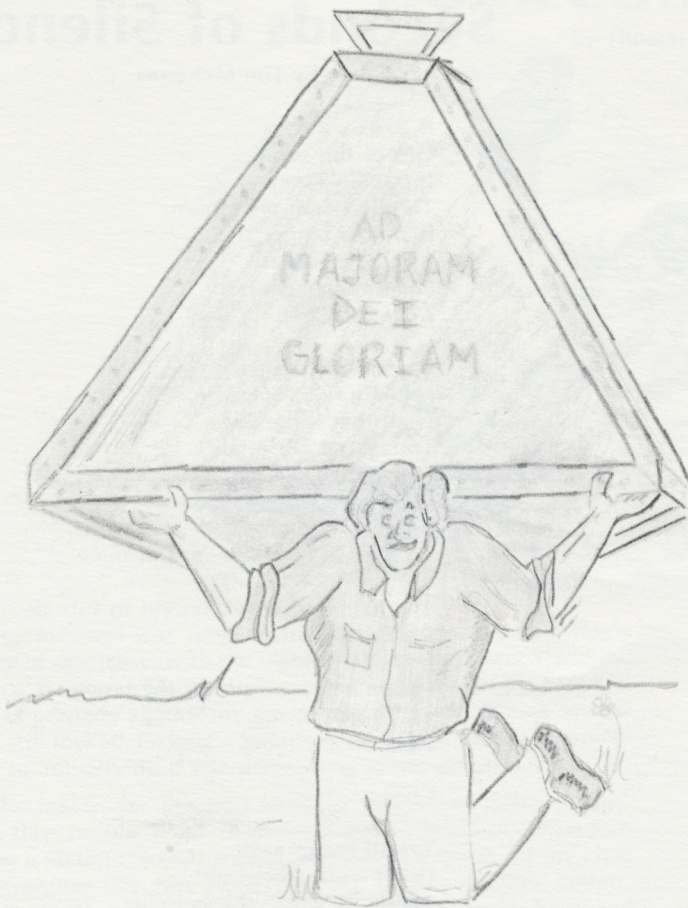
## The Battle

by Jeff Russo

The battle was of pomp and glory,  
A noble and heroic story.  
Their strategies were brilliant — bright.  
Their soldiers' spirits willed the fight.  
The foremost captain charged the flank;  
The other's artillery held the bank.  
Into the night went the battle's rage,  
And by my light I turned the page . . .

Sleepy I was for one more look,  
And then silently I closed the book,  
And as I rested I began to think:  
War is written with blood, not ink.





## Real Men

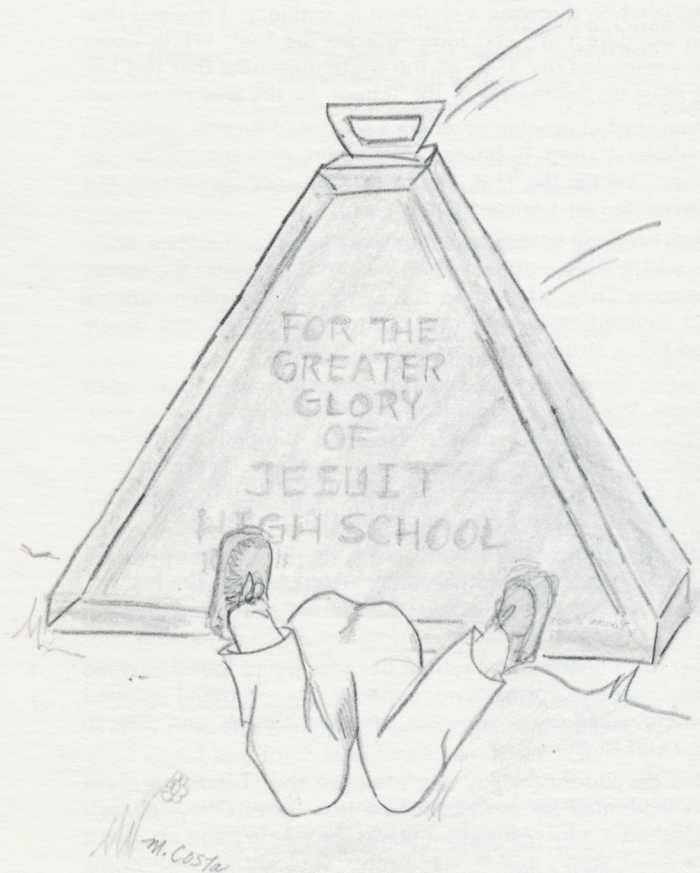
by Jeff Russo

Real men don't eat quiche, I've heard,  
But I don't think they know the word.  
Leather they like; but never wear pink;  
Macho's the thing, so they try not to think.  
They love a brawl and never show pain.  
Bronson's their Bible; God is John Wayne.  
They love to talk politics; they are so involved  
They already have the situation resolved.  
They know we should blow the Russians to hell;  
They want them right there, with the USFL.  
They love easy women, beer, and good SKOAL.  
They love to B.S. about the last 'Bowl.  
They're loners with friends who never cry,  
And to watch Richard Simmons? they rather would die.  
Real men are always suspicious and wary,  
And I think real men are really imaginary.  
And to those very few who belong to this lot,  
Your lungs will grow gray, and kidneys will rot;  
Your children, if any, will be foolish and vain.  
Real men are great! They just ain't quite sane.

## ... And the Ink Runs

by Rex Cacciatore

The starving artists and bleeding hearts are inspired.  
They eagerly grasp the pen and make it glide  
gracefully across the shining paper.  
And even though the piece is a true gift for crying souls,  
The authors are told in the back of their minds  
that their message won't get across.  
... And the ink runs.  
Then the delicate writings are shattered  
when discovered by the laughing eyes and clammy hands  
of misunderstanding people  
that savagely reject anything that's not  
of their own thought.  
... And the ink runs.  
Though the writers try to try again,  
they soon realize that their thoughts are now controlled  
by the conformity of the beasts dressed in people's clothing.  
... And the ink runs.





# Silence

by Michael Lopez

"After silence that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music."

—Aldous Huxley

"It is wise to learn; it is God-like to create."

—John Saxe

Silence.

The universe is at silence.

Then, from the empirical world,

he crosses the threshold to create existence.

A soothing trill of light and dark plays before him.

He applies the damper pedal, and thus

one constant view emerges from this fundamental trill.

In time a harmonic interval is established

among sea, earth, and air. Therefore the chord progression

prepares the tropisphere for the grand melody which is

composed for the entire life cycle. At that time, he

interposes a counter-melody of all living things.

The four movements which will become the seasons of the sonata are thus composed.

The composition continues through the four seasons until the last fermata. Here at al Fine all being sustains itself for one last collection of unforgettable perceptibility.

Then, as he lifts his fingers from the keyboard, the sound of existence is released.

Silence.

# The Typewriter

by Jeff Russo

As it sits there quite coldly,  
You begin at it — like, boldly,

Moving slow, as confidence fades,  
Its mocking appearance soon degrades,

Your fingers lie in tense apprehension;  
The first key rings in dreadful dissension.

Again and again, in a resounding barrage —  
You're doing just fine — but you misspelled "garage"!

The tension mounts — the toll it takes!  
Again and again, then two, three more mistakes.

Energy — lost with each letter-life-giving tap.  
Brain — mesmerized by each persistent rap-rap.

Your body cries out for mercy and rest;  
Beginning to tire, you're put to the test.

Driving on, punching away —  
Aches and pain persistently stay.

Then as the spasms course through your hands  
The monster keeps milling, the fiend still stands!

As your mind draws a blank, as you pant and perspire,  
The keys drop down — and you soon expire.

# Words

by Mark Thomas

Leave us alone.

Make the martyrs that we are

Into masters of Fate, and wheels of Freedom.

Go travel the Earth's expanses

Leaving no sign of your roller skate wheels;

Cover your tracks with salt.

Please, leave the ugly girls alone;

They too want to be like you—

Molders of mind, owners of home.

Scribble what you know on an index card.

Don't let the boogeyman bite.

Secretary, take a message: I'm leaving home tonight.

Suburban avenues and the green, green grass

Make no setting for the evil at heart.

Graffiti mark the walls of real culture,

Life we tried so hard to avoid.

"Roses are red, and violets are blue,"

It means nothing when it all boils down

Because when the children are all going inside,

The words spoken in spite of mind

Come to words spoken through a child's own home

Words better burned on an index card.

Real men, they wouldn't let the boogeymen bite,

A real child would only be afraid.

Test our mothers, test our fathers,

See if anyone really cares.

Don't drown your mind in smooth hotel wine;

Use words to blood; use words to war.

In the night rides a stallion, bursting into glory,

Through the morning soars a dove, searching for a reason.

Sunset falls, and words take on meanings,

Outcasts stand alone.

When the sun rises, bringing silver on the clouds,

Men will still search for the reason,

Abandoning mind; abandoning home.

Children are always in need of a question.



# I Don't Believe in Santa Claus

by Jeff Russo

I don't believe in Santa Claus.  
Against this myth there should be laws.  
You find one in every store —  
They've spread this fake from shore to shore.  
Some are tall while others lack  
The height they need, and some are black!  
With this propaganda I cannot relax:  
Imagine a man our government can't tax.  
And that silly red suit is really a rave,  
But maybe he thinks it might be new wave.  
Worse than him I hate his elves;  
Their heads should be waxed and stacked on shelves.  
There also is nothing at the gloomy North Pole.  
To end this plot I've made my goal.  
Yet millions more are fooled by these.  
My toys are made — by the Japanese.  
Mom and Dad buy them, at an expensive rate —  
That's why I get less at Christmas of late.  
And so fat a man I would love to see  
Try to get through our tiny chimney.  
And flying around with some deer in a sleigh —  
I'll wager Pan Am doesn't do it that way.  
And lovers of Rudolph I would beat with a hose —  
Electricity wasn't conducted through Edison's nose.  
But you might ask why I make such a fuss —  
I just don't think he believes in us.  
You might also ask why I'm so bold —  
Remember, after all, I'm seven years old!

## THE DIFFICULTIES OF CHU-SING

by Mark Smith

Yes, Kyushi, I made the right choice. If I hadn't, it is doubtful that I would be here recounting my tale to you. Nay, not all of my choices were correct, but that is only nature's way. For if we did not make mistakes, would we not be gods? And if gods we are, why have we death among us? But enough of my cackling like a Noloro logician. I will tell you of what befell me on my journey.

Its origin was on the night of the Serpent in the month of the Ram. I was entranced in one of Master Ryusaki's writings when I heard footsteps on the cobblestones. It was not the step of stealth, so I went to greet my caller with open arms. I opened the door to admit him and found to my total surprise that it was my Shidoshi, Ryuko. I noticed right away his gauntness and look of concentration. I had never before seen him that way, so I naturally questioned him while serving him tea. We talked through half of the night. He told me of the assassination of Emperor Shontu and of his two firstborn sons. I was shocked, for I had heard no news of it.

In answer to my query of how he came across the information, he replied, "Chu-Sing, I have not yet told you, but I have been the Emperor's (may Oruborus take in his wandering soul) aide. We have kept this secret since his death this morning. As I have said, his first two sons were killed, but as you know, Ayusaki has been living incognito somewhere in Danalozu. This is the purpose of my visit here: I would ask of you to try to locate Ayusaki and to bring him back to rule in his father's stead. Keep this meeting and its contents secret, for if the Bunshi hear of it, they will assuredly try to gain the crown for themselves. Will you try to locate Ayusaki?"

I realized the dangers immediately of what would happen to the country if I did not, but I also saw my personal risk. As I have been brought up by the Bushido, I accepted the responsibility.

Ryuko told me of where Ayusaki could be found and what I had to do to prove that I was a friend. I then equipped myself and set out in search of the prince. I realized that I might be setting out on a useless quest, for whoever killed the Emperor and his sons must have had a definite purpose in mind, and they were more than likely to be searching for Ayusaki also. I still had to try to the utmost of my ability to find him.

I had been traveling for two days and nights when I became aware of somebody following me. I slipped a dagger into my hand from a sheath hidden in my sleeve, but continued traveling. At a turning in the path, I reigned in my horse and brought him into the cover of the forest. I withdrew my longsword, Deathshed, from its scabbard and waited for my unwary pursuers. Presently, four men came around the bend. They were all dressed in the traditional black suits of the Ninjutsu.

Right away they knew that something was amiss. My trail stopped at the bend, and they did not see a sign of me anywhere. The men started to dismount. I hesitated no longer; I knew that I would have to reduce their number right away or fight them all at the same time. I threw my knife at one while planting my sword in the ground. I then slipped a shuriken into each hand, and with a flick of the wrists, let them fly. I was rewarded with cries from all three of my targets, indicating hits. I withdrew Deathshed from the ground and rushed the men, at the same time withdrawing my shorter sword, Serpent Strike, from its sheath.

The man I threw the dagger at was face down on the ground with it protruding from his neck. One of my shuriken targets was partially in the stirrup and part way on the ground with it in his brain. The other two were now coming toward me, one armed with a spear, and the other with bokken and my bloody shuriken which he had extruded from his shoulder. He threw it at me, but I ducked aside and heard it land in the foliage in



back of me. They were lined up side by side. I lifted my leg to avoid a low spear strike intended to rip the muscles in my calf, and brought Deathshed around in a decapitating swing. His momentum was carrying him towards me, so he could only twist aside, not enough to save him. The other swung at my chest, but I easily blocked it with Deathshed, using my inverted sword form. That is, I kept it held in reversed position with the tip facing towards the rear of me. As he reared back for another strike, I whirled into a position that enabled me to either kick him or to use an inverted thrust. I chose the latter, for I did not feel like prolonging the fight. I realized my mistake too late. If I had subdued him, I might have been able to find out who sent him. Well, it was too late then. I retrieved my shuriken and dagger and replaced them. I then started out on my way to Danalozu, leaving the men where they fell.

I reached my destination without further mishap, but this leg of the journey was the most difficult. When I went to where Ayusaki was staying, he wasn't there. The proprietress told me that he had gone away with two other men. She said that he had looked drugged when he left, but that she hadn't said anything to the men about it. She did let me search the room in which he had stayed, a privilege I would have taken upon myself even without her permission.

I found the word "Bunshi" etched into the wall, so I decided to ride there. From Danalozu, there were two paths to Bunshi. I picked the shorter of the two. After only a day of travel, I came upon signs of struggle. From the looks, it had only happened hours before. There was a steady path of blood leading towards Bunshi, and I urged my steed to greater speed. Further up, I came upon a man only minutes dead. I was closer than I thought. I raced ahead, determined to catch up with the men.

My quarry was in sight. They had not yet seen me, though. There were six of them, including Ayusaki. I loaded a ball into my combo sling, tucked my bakahatsugama and kyoketsu-shogue into my sash, and crept forward to a mere twenty yards from the men. I heard them arguing about Ayusaki. Two of them wanted to kill him while the other three were explaining to them that the Lord Tayogushi wanted him alive. I did not want to wait for them to finish the argument; I shot one in the temple with the combo sling and knocked him unconscious. I pulled the kyoketsu-shogue from my sash and swung the chain around my head. I threw the ring around one man and trapped him. I extracted the bakahatsugama from my sash while stabbing the trapped man. I felt a sword stroke coming towards me, so I ducked under it and brought the kama into the man's abdomen. I let go of the kyoketsu-shogue and rushed at the ninja who was going to kill Ayusaki. I pulled the chain from the handle of the bakahatsugama and threw it around his legs. He fell on his face, but as he was falling, he pulled a shuriken from his pocket and threw it at Ayusaki. Luckily, I realized what he was going to do, so when he was about to throw, I jerked back on the chain. The throw went wide. I ran to where he was trying to disentangle himself and hacked him in the back. I heard a whistling coming towards me and jumped out of the way of a swinging shockaku. The last man left had a shockaku in one hand and a fan in the other. I withdrew Serpent Strike from its sheath and stuck the bakahatsugama in the way of the shockaku and let it wrap around it. I then jerked it out of his hand. He pulled out another fan and started circling me, weaving them around in a deadly net of steel. He suddenly jumped into me swinging both fans in deadly arcs aimed at my head. I jumped up and over him, twisted and flipped to land behind him. I then slipped Serpent Strike into his kidney and ripped up.

After binding the unconscious man, I looked after Ayusaki. He was already recovering from the drug and not much worse from the ordeal. I retrieved my weapons and brought my horse over. I tied all of the horses' reigns together and the unconscious man into the saddle and we set off for home.

We traveled non-stop back here. You know of the crowning and of my reward, so I've told you everything that you didn't previously know. Now, get off to bed. ■

## "simpler tykes"

(a tribute to e.e. cummings)  
by Matt Costa

teilhardsfolly's  
so melancholy  
to Mites and menalike  
we condescend  
but seldom lend  
an ear to simpler tykes  
those called insane  
in loud refrain  
'cause they're tied within their  
dreams  
are cast away  
or damned to stay  
in jackets without  
seams  
within their ignorance  
lies a gentle innocence  
bore so openly unto  
the blind  
unshielded bodies  
in tampered shodies  
that shine with humble  
mind



er  
gh  
hi  
ng  
si  
we are all ri  
and c o nvergi n g  
our attire  
i feel that they are moving  
abitfaster  
for in their naive objectiveness  
lies a lack of human selectiveness  
and a knowledge of  
whatisReal  
and  
whatisbastard  
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they're saints



# FRUCTIFICATION

by Sean McKenna

Don't worry about the government. It does what it does efficiently and with the best interests of its citizens and the inhabitants of all other nations in mind. Yes. I suppose this quaint indoctrination provides a safe cushion of rationality against the alternative, ensuing insanity, as I design horrifyingly deadly instruments of chemical and atomic warfare for the benevolent institution of the policies of our technologically potent imperialistic machine; be that as it may.

I calculate in tandem with a huge assemblage of engineering prowess to conceptualize the new generation of burgeoning death. The flowering of all my artistic and intellectual gifts creates a beautiful weapon which most assuredly will destroy the most dogmatically entrenched, barbarian opponents of our democratic constitution. I delight in knowing how my work will crackle across a Third World sunset and cascade fiery holocaust upon swarming troops who cower behind futile defenses, or upon even more helpless enemy peasants who realize, amidst their vomiting death orgasms, the utter hypocrisy of their stupid faith in a set of contradictory syllogisms and excremental philosophies.

See the creeping green slime sprout from the locus of impact and crawl over the smoking debris on the glassy, melted battlefield onto trembling soldiers and through their corneas to devour their weak, screaming, cowardly brains. It makes one flinch and jerk with some itchy aberration, no? Or notice the bright particle rays flicker over the spasmodic brown skin of heretics, making it solidify, then crumble. A slumping avalanche of protoplasm squirms against the smouldering hovel in which it used to fearfully live.

The rough synthetic straps press deep into my camouflaged uniform skin and the underlying protective layers which can only partially negate the ravages of radiation, gases, and genetically mutated combative atrocities. Palpitations twitchy-beat my sternum; vision clouds and eardrums thrust outward with erratic hisses. Through glazed eyes sticking to lids I strain to catch a glimpse of the tormented space outside the helicopter. The verdant, flowing expanse of the Nicaraguan jungle rushes past at disorienting angles. Distant artillery makes the tropical air vibrate and fills it with obstruction.

"This training mission will illustrate the power of our forces and will provide you with first-hand war expertise," the lean and tenacious instructor had asserted. "You will know why, what, and how science kills." The instructor paced the front of the lecture hall with tightly preconsidered movement. One foot two three. His words were electrically terse. The incandescent light shone brilliantly from the circular lenses of his spectacles and obscured what must have been jesuitical eyes.

How cold. The United Nations is dissolved. Whatever. Where there is no responsibility, there can be no guilt. I remember,

when we were young, certain overriding concepts called morality and human rights were an integral component of all policy to various extents. Now we are calculating, eminently reasonable and free from any emotional constraint.

I close my eyes, let the biofeedback self-restraints go so my head can spin in temporary oblivion. Careless vertigo a little high. Digression of consciousness into a previous human happiness. Running down the beach with sand between my toes, diving in, being cast about like a piece of weed. In and out, furious unison with nature and wife, until at the height of imagined passion I descend to purposeful reality. It's all so neatly automatic.

I awaken with tears and mucus on my shielded face. The suit will make it dry without any hygienic response on my part. Forget the weaknesses of an obsolete humanism and train the mind for the precarious here and now. Art is smashed, family is broken, society is policed, sex is limp, all sacrificed for the sake of the fateful struggle. Guerrilla war struggle is the new entertainment, and global thermonuclear maelstrom is the world championship. Suck goes my environmental regulation I can see clearly now the snot is gone.

Looking past my glassed visor, the window of my independent warhome, at my ten fellow ex-human victory architects, I cannot help but notice their contorted fidgeting as indications of their atavistic ramblings through the realm of the subconscious. One green figure spasmodically shakes his head and shoulders he too possesses a wonderful memory he hides from sweeping indoctrination legs crossed mean lost eroticism arms folded mean adrenalized disquietude wake up something is about to happen and we must be intense I feel my organs slosh in a sea of internal cavity inertia with gravity signals our down down down too too fast onto an uncharted somewhere surface only visible is the vibrating encasement cradling ten other coffins outside

is undulating pervasive worm gas conqueror

which causes urgent directives that frantic commanders screech over fritzing communications

code g landing in high density enemy sector is heavily polluted observe maximum protective measures we are descending prepare to disembark and defend yourselves

what an ultimate violent confusion of my nonsenses taste death see brain smell panic caress hell where is our preconceived planning our lovely design aren't we in command enough to assure one passive unarmed observing party some security on the fringes safely removed from the vortex of the horrible epic for the preservation of democracy in central america God i know that weapon that is my fatal offspring that monster outside detonates eyes melts brain i drown in a sea of yellow rain

■



# SUBURBIA

by Jeff Kenny

The 32-function digital watch on Bob Matthews' wrist finally displayed "5:00." His real estate company was in the process of destroying innumerable worthless trees to make room for much-needed "strip centers" in the northern suburbs. Even though he had a room-temperature I.Q., Bob managed to make over \$100,000 a year.

Bob grabbed his simulated leather briefcase and hopped into his Mercedes. Although this automobile was "built for speed," he had to contend with the seemingly endless line of Hondas, Mercedes, BMW's, and Datsun 280ZX's that constipated the only main highway into Northwood.

As his Mercedes idled past the subdivisions of Northwood Oaks, Northwood Meadows, Northwood Shrubberies, Northwood Tree-Mosses, and Northwood Algae, Bob made a fruitless attempt to recall exactly what he had done at work that week.

The Matthews family lived in Phase Twenty-seven of Northwood Pines. (Bob had never seen a pine tree in his subdivision or any tree for that matter. He didn't know why and he really didn't care.)

As the endless line of middle-aged women joggers passed by, Bob noticed that his neighbor Ed Feldstein had just finished mowing his lawn and was measuring the blades of grass to confirm that they were all precisely three inches high.

Bob pushed the button of his automatic garage-door opener and entered the carport of his generic house. (Actually, his house differed from the Feldsteins' because the Matthews' slanted roof formed a 37-degree rather than a 38-degree angle with the west wall.) When he entered the kitchen, Bob found that his wife Linda had left for her aerobic dance class but had done some grocery shopping earlier that afternoon. In the refrigerator he found the usual: six cartons of Stouffer's "Lean Cuisine" frozen dinners and seven bags full of Yoplait yogurt. His two youngest children, Ashly and Thurston, had gotten off the bus from their school in the slums hours ago and were playing with the dog Beaugard. Thurston had forgotten to feed his pet fish, Baby Pac-Man. The little goldfish now swam on its side.

Suddenly Bob heard the roaring car stereo of a Datsun 280ZX and knew that his seventeen-year-old son Walt was home. As Bob handed Walt a pair of \$100 bills for his weekly allowance, he reaffirmed that it was right to pull Walt out of prep school after he had developed a varicose ulcer on his calf due to the intense competition.

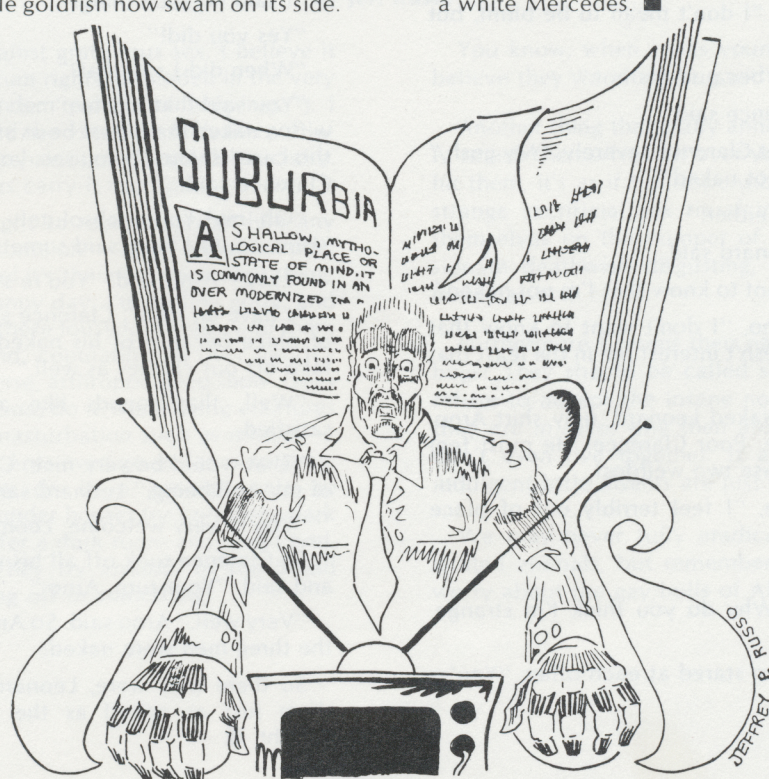
"Putting my boy in a public high school where he can have fun will do him good," Bob thought. "Well, I did it and I'm rich."

Bob began his nightly search for the *TV Guide*, unaware that Walt was in his room listening to The Talking Heads' "Once in a Lifetime" and free-basing \$200 worth of cocaine.

After putting a frozen dinner in the microwave, Bob reached for his remote control of the big-screen TV. (Ed Feldstein had complained when Bob put a satellite dish in his back yard.) He flipped past the shows that he couldn't grasp (i.e. "Masterpiece Theater," "The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather," "Green Acres," "The Electric Company") and finally decided to spend an evening appreciating the aesthetic qualities of "Gomer Pyle U.S.M.C." This proved to be a fatal mistake.

During the program Gomer mentioned to Sarge that he was "reading a book." What confused Bob about this scene was the word "book." Although he had heard the word thousands of times he had never had any reason to figure out what it meant. Like the mythical "Star Trek" computer that receives a word that's not in its programming, Bob's mind began to self-destruct. He wanted to look the word up, but he didn't know what to look in. He desperately tried to splash some cold Perrier water on his face but that didn't work . . .

Bob Matthews was last seen being escorted out of Northwood by a little man in a white coat, Alistair Cooke, and an animated pine tree. The insane asylum was kind enough to send a white Mercedes. ■





# The Exploits of Little Billy

by Richard Solomon

Little Billy is a hacker,  
Little Billy sits for weeks.  
When Little Billy writes a program,  
Little Billy pokes and peeks.

Little Billy is a hacker,  
Little Billy battles bugs.  
When Little Billy doesn't beat them,  
Little Billy hires thugs.

Little Billy is a hacker,  
Little Billy is a pest.  
When Little Billy crashes systems,  
Little Billy likes it best.

Little Billy was a hacker,  
Little Billy's brain was fried.  
When Little Billy saw that low score,  
Little Billy up and died.



## PERFECT LOGIC

by Mark Thomas

One day, three men, Leonard, Clarence, and Arno, were walking down the street. They walked in silence until Leonard turned to Arno and said, "I do declare, Arno, that has to be the ugliest shirt I've ever seen."

Arno replied, "At least I'm wearing a shirt, Leonard."

And he was right! Leonard wasn't wearing a shirt. Or shoes. Or pants. In fact, Leonard was totally naked.

"Leonard," Clarence began, "I don't mean to be blunt, but why are you so naked?"

"I'm naked," Leonard said, "because it's hot."

"Well, I'm not naked," Clarence said.

Leonard turned and looked at Clarence severely. "My gosh," he said. "You're right. You're not naked."

Arno cut in. "I'm not naked either."

"Well, who asked you?" Leonard said.

"I just thought you might want to know that I'm not naked."

"Well," Leonard said to Arno, "I don't want to know that you're not naked. In fact, it doesn't interest me in the least that you're not naked. So there."

So there stood three men. Naked Leonard, ugly shirt Arno, and perfectly normal Clarence. Poor Clarence! He must feel terribly out of place amidst these two weirdos!

"I must say," said Clarence, "I feel terribly out of place around you two weirdos."

I told you.

Leonard looked shocked. "Why do you think I'm strange, Clarence?"

There was a pause as the two stared at each other. "You're naked," Clarence said slowly.

"So what," Leonard said.

"Anyone who would walk down the street naked with two clothed men is strange," Clarence said.

Leonard thought for a moment. "Well . . . any two men that would walk down the street with a naked man must be equally as strange as a man who would walk down the street naked with two clothed men." Leonard looked proud.

"So you admit," Clarence said, "that you're strange."

"I said no such thing!"

"Yes you did!"

"When did I say that?"

"You said that any two men who would walk down the street with a naked man must be as strange as the naked man who, in this case, is you. So you see, you even said that you're strange," Clarence said.

"Oh, my! You're absolutely right!" Leonard said astounded. "How could I have said something so stupid?"

"Easy," Arno said. "You're stupid."

"I have an idea," Clarence said. "Since Leonard feels so out of place because of his nakedness, I suggest that Arno and I take off our clothes as well."

"Well, that sounds like a wonderful idea!" Arno said satisfied.

"That would be very nice, Clarence. Thank you for thinking of my well-being," Leonard said.

"You're very welcome, Leonard," said Clarence.

So Clarence took off all his clothes. Then he looked at Arno and said, "Your turn, Arno."

"Very well," Arno said. So Arno took off his ugly clothes, and the three men were naked.

So there they were, Leonard, Clarence, and Arno; each of them just as naked as the next one, much to Leonard's delight. ■



# THE THREE LITTLE PIGS REVISITED

by Rich Lesperance

There were once three little pigs who decided to build houses. Recalling what happened to their cousins, all three of them built their houses out of brick. Runner and Punner, the first two pigs, were done in a few days and went skipping off to the fields to play. Gunner, the wisest of the trio, spent days obtaining some "special provisions" for his house, pausing only to sleep, eat, and watch a few "Happy Days" reruns. Punner and Runner wondered what Gunner was wasting his time on but were too busy frolicking to care.

As eventually happens in any fairy tale involving pigs, a wolf in search of a pork pie came creeping into the area. This wolf had heard about his cousin's mishaps with brick houses and was prepared. He first came to Runner's house.

"Open up or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!" cried the wolf.

"Aw, come on," said Runner, "you know that you can't blow down a brick house!"

The wolf knew that the pig was right, but he came prepared. The wolf crept up the side of the house, dropped an asbestos

blanket down the chimney to extinguish the fire and dropped down on the unwary pig. Runner went careening out the door, bumping into two trees and arriving safely at Punner's house.

There the wolf pulled the same stunt, sending the two pigs scurrying to Gunner's house, their last refuge.

The wolf stormed up to the house and started reciting his speech.

"Open up or I'll huff and I'll puff and . . ."

"Come on in!" cried Gunner.

The wolf bounded up to the door, joyful at his intimidating the pigs into surrender. He threw open the front door and got the smirk neatly blown off his face by a 12-gauge double-barrelled shotgun. Exit the wolf.

The morals of this story are:

1. Pigs don't play by the rules.
2. Never trust anyone with an NRA sticker on his front door.

# THE B.S. ABOUT LOVE BUGS

by Jeff Russo

I have absolutely nothing against gratuitous sex. I believe it to be one of our most basic human rights, defended in the very Constitution of our country (under "pursuit of happiness"). I have always vigorously defended the virtue (or lack thereof) of hedonistic attitudes, lecherous behavior, and total debauchery. Even I, however, think love bugs carry it too far.

I mean, sure, they have a right to reproduce just like any other living organism, but hey, come on — don't you think they carry it a little too far? Even I feel it's the most obnoxious thing. I'm walking along, it's a nice sunny day, I'm feeling good, and then, all of a sudden, I run into these lousy love bugs; and there they are happily buzzing around, copulating all over me. It's like watching some sort of perverse, arthropod peep show. Dogs do it. Cats do it. People (thank God) do it. Most living creatures have sex (barring microscopic masturbation such as mitosis — that is, of course, cell division). Ants even go so far as to gang-rape their queen — but they do it in private! Ants go underground, dogs and cats go under houses (or find some dark corner), and people usually prefer a dark room and a soft bed. But what do love bugs do? They fly around, in the broad daylight, as if they were showing off or something.

You know, when I was young (very, very young), I used to believe they were one bug with two heads.

Another thing that really annoys me is the way they carelessly smash themselves all over your car. When I'm driving and I hit them, it's as if I'm responsible for the grand finale of some strange sacrificial sex ritual in which they lustily terminate themselves on the bumper of my car. Not only is their passionate deathwish disgusting, but the results are obviously messy as hell.

Furthermore I resent their names. Why are they called love bugs? They should be called slut bugs or in-sex. I absolutely refuse to accept the insane notion that they are "in love." If they are in love, why then aren't they married? In fact, they don't even live together. It appears to me that these self-indulgent little insects are just looking for a quickie.

We may never fully eradicate the menace of these little x-rated animals, but remember: if we do, then we'll have to worry about the gay bulls of Alberta, Canada. ■



## UNIMPRESSIVE

by Nick Simon



Looking up from a particularly difficult translation, Francis Wintig was startled to discover that the office was empty. Mr. Wintig pushed himself away from his sullied little desk where there lay a copy of a terribly boring Germanic astrological history text. Groping beneath his desk for his briefcase, he struggled with his overcoat, speckled gray by weather of days past.

Francis, a gaunt and anemic man, turned and surveyed the bleak office. For seven and a half years he had been working in the Table of Contents section of Arlings-Barko foreign translations. Francis fixed his silver spectacles upon his thin nose and strode up the aisle and between rows of dilapidated, splintering desks. Small clouds of dust swirled and settled in soft, fading beams of light that issued from the slats of shutters nailed tight. The old floorboards creaked and moaned as Francis unknowingly tortured them with his lagging left leg. Clump Scrape Clump Clump Scrape. The scraping, moaning, clumping, and creaking combined to produce a discordant symphony of melancholy composition.



—Whoa, Wintig! Take it easy!

It was L.L. Barko that had stopped Francis in his tracks. L.L. had an odd habit.

—Working late, eh? You're one in a million, did you know that, Wintig?

—Excuse me, sir.

—You have got to stop and smell the roses once in a while, get me?

—I think so, sir.

Francis didn't get him, though. He never quite understood Mr. Barko. The obese executive continued:

—Men like you aren't a dime a dozen, you know. But listen, let's bury the hatchet here. You're movin' up in this company a mile-a-minute, but don't count your chickens before they hatch!

—Okay, sir.

Mr. Barko was the master of the superfluous phrase. Fat rippled across his body as he chuckled lightly.

—What I mean to say is that you can lead a horse to water but you just can't make him drink no matter how hard you try. Did you know that?

—No sir, but thank you for telling me.

Moreover, Mr. Barko used just about every trite expression ever created.

—In any case, don't work your fingers to the bone. I mean, early to bed early to rise makes the man healthy and wise, right?

—I guess so, sir. Goodnight.

An air vent pumping streams of unpleasantly warm and musty air disturbed the sparse strands of sandy hair remaining on his head. Francis had a receding hairline which was accentuated by the thinning light of the evening.

Past the executive offices, past the stern and convicting eyes of long-deceased Mr. Arlings, and past the gurgling water cooler littered with flimsy paper cones, Mr. Wintig was confronted by a cool fall wind. The mail slot clanked noisily as he shut the heavy door.

Once outside, Francis began to feel very strange, which was in itself peculiar because he rarely felt strange on Tuesday evenings. He could sense his body soaking up the long, empty shadows of the departing day as a sponge might absorb some uninteresting spill of liquid. He stepped into the narrow corridor of the street and faced with some reluctance the approaching walk home.

In an amazing spectacle of geological misfortune, the land beneath this small town had, in the last fifty years, managed to sink and bulge in a most disconcerting manner. The buckling land not only caused the town to look ludicrously crooked but also created a sense of urgency among its people as if they should have been doing something to prevent the various

buildings from toppling over. This was, in a sense, true because a number of houses had actually become victims of this monster. Francis was nearly always shrouded in this urgency, mainly because his own house was so positioned as possibly to be the next on the list.

But today this sense of urgency was absent and the walk to his tilted home on the high hill seemed a senseless, tiresome journey. As he walked up the slope, obtrusive buildings began to narrow his path. Clumsy, cracking, brickish giants tried to impede further progress. Without warning, an unnaturally tangible rain of trepidation soaked Francis to the soul. He began to run. He was being chased by, or maybe was chasing, something. Whatever it was, it was accompanied by an indiscernible fear. In a stumbling lope, Francis tumbled over dirty-faced children and under changing, ocher, crimson trees of fall.

In a flurry of arms and legs he stumbled up to the walkway leading to his front door. Several crinkled, browning leaves skittered nervously by him propelled by a silent breeze.

Ignoring the weed-laced cracks in the concrete stairway, he opened the flimsy screen door and entered his reclining house. He switched on the television and plopped into his special, tattered reading chair. While waiting for the old television to warm up, his wife, as tattered as his chair, called to him from the kitchen,

—Your dinner is almost ready, dear.

The hum of the T.V. filled the room and the cold, blue light turned his round spectacles into reflecting silver coins.

—I'm glad to see that you could make it, said the newscaster to Wintig. This surprised Francis a bit, considering that the six o'clock anchorman didn't usually speak to him personally from the T.V.

—What you are about to see on your television screen will in all likelihood change your life forever. Prepare yourself, if you will, to witness all of the glory and power of the universe on this little screen.

—Come quick, dear! shouted Francis to his wife.

The universe in its entirety is to be shown on our T.V.!

—That's nice, dear. Be there in a minute.

She really did believe him.

—Oh my, there it is, exclaimed Francis with a certain lack of excitement.

—Oh no, it's gone now, said Francis.

His wife entered the room and looked at him inquisitively.

—What was it like? she asked.

There was a pause.

There was another pause.

—Well, sort of pink and squarish.

His wife blinked, or maybe it was a wince.

—My, that is unimpressive. ■



# CATFIGHT

by Mark Thomas

*Good evening, this is 880 AM radio, and you're listening to "Talk of the Town," where tonight's subject is "What do you Think is the Greatest Threat to America Today?" Some of tonight's callers have said . . .*

The cats fight in the street at night. No one ever tries to stop the cats, and no one sees why anyone should. The cats just go out there and fight until one of them retreats. I watch them fight sometimes. One of them prowls his territory as the street lies in wait. The crickets become silenced when the second cat appears. The two cats' glimmering eyes glare at each other as they dash around the street in circles. They run in silence until they meet. Then, the neighborhood sleep wakes suddenly. Lights flash on, doors open, and two cats scurry off into the night.

Come morning, families around the block seek to discover if the catfight involved their feline. Occasionally, a cat is wounded. These are the fights that people remember for some reason. It seems rather strange that I most vividly remember the fights in which blood shows.

However, it's not midnight yet, and the cats haven't been let out of their houses. It's 8:50 P.M.

*Good evening, you're on "Talk of the Town"!*

No reply.

*Yes! You're on live radio!*

No reply.

*Thousands of people are listening, hanging on your every word.*

No reply.

*On a tape delay basis.*

*Oh! Am I on?*

*Naw! We're just crank callers here. Only unusual thing is that you call us to be cranked!*

No reply.

*Forget it! And the phone dropped.*

It's time. I know it's time. It's time for someone to tell us that he is the salvation. It's time for someone to write music that everyone will understand. It's time for us to drop our guns and read the patterns in the wind. It's time for us to realize it's time, because it is time.

My room is dark and quiet. Except for the barely audible AM radio, my breathing is the only sound. Sweatshirts, socks, and pants are scattered around the room. I am lying on my bed looking out the window next to me at the street outside. It is very calm and very cool outside.

A typewriter is lying in a corner of my room hidden under the sleeve of a sweatshirt and the smelly end of a sock. I might release myself and get up to write something on it, but I probably won't. I have written a lot of poetry before, but everybody writes poetry. *Anybody* can write poetry. A person could sit down and write something that makes sense to neither him nor the rest of the world, but one person will assume it's unintelligibility with deep and profound meaning. That's just the way the world works—the poet writes the words and everyone else tells him what they mean.

*It's 8:59 P.M., and we're not going to have time for another caller, so we'll be back in a few minutes after NBC News to continue our program. Once again, tonight's subject is, "What do you Think is the Greatest Threat to America Today?"*

## Pretender

by Sam Youakim

They're all gone, and so is she,  
With a kiss and a hug and a slap in the face,  
Like the embrace of a clear, blue ocean  
As it drags you to your death.

And I am sitting and thinking  
Of the pleasure with a smile and a tear in my eye.  
"It is not manly to cry," they say  
As they jump from the ledge.

The trap is set straight ahead,  
And I see it as it closes around me.  
I may not think bad thoughts to be good,  
But I must love to be man.

## Macbeth

by Jeff Russo

When once again around they gather,  
Heartened by the moon-lit lather,  
Forsake the goodness specters see —  
Forsaken more, the sisters three,  
As many years the blood's been let,  
The caldron's cooled, the mayhem met,  
But still the stench of witches' work.  
In man's black mind black passions lurk,  
Blacker than the dark outside,  
The evil night they must abide,  
Hearts wrapped round with serpent's coil.  
The women wail, their brew doth boil.  
A life as scant as raven's breath,  
A victim's madman cries: "Macbeth"!



What an interesting question that is. I should call the station and say something stupid, like herpes. That redneck host they've got would probably laugh and hang up like he did earlier to that woman who didn't know she was on the air.

*What's the matter, Mrs. Brown?*

*Oh . . . nothing.*

*Constipation?*

*And I'm not thrilled with my laxative.*

Commercials. I wish they would just go away. Why in the world *should* you be thrilled with a laxative? All a laxative does is make you fart.

*. . . and watch the pain just disappear overnight.*

I wish it was that simple.

Stupid as that dumb commercial is, I know I'd buy Ex-Lax if the need to fart ever came up. That's how stupid that commercial is.

*Good evening, this is Gene Kelly.*

*In the news this evening, the Ku Klux Klan has staged another march under protest . . .*

The KKK. As far as I or anyone that I want to deal with is concerned, the KKK is just a bunch of sixth graders in Halloween costumes dressed to scare. It has to be the scariest thing in the world to see a mob of faceless people marching toward you sporting a flaming cross. I've never seen a KKK march, and I don't want to start anything new, so I wouldn't consider myself chicken for running away from them.

*Okay! We're back on "Talk of the Town," where tonight's subject is . . .*

Disc-jockeys must get awfully tired of saying the same things over and over again. I only notice because I am reluctant to use the same word twice in a single sentence, let alone repeat the same sentence over and over again like this guy is doing.

I slowly phase out the radio and listen to sounds from outside. My window is opened. I can hear nothing but an orchestra of crickets and a couple of men talking quite loudly on the neighbor's back porch. I'm not really paying attention to what is being said, but I can hear something concerning a confusion of who was the algebra teacher and who was the science teacher in high school. This sampling of conversation makes me distract myself to other sounds.

A soft breeze is coming from the east. A dog is defecating on someone's mailbox. An orange falls from the tree in the front yard and rolls a few feet to a peaceful rest. I decided that that was the most significant event, the orange falling, because I've never seen an orange fall from a tree at 9:13 P.M. on a night as cool as this. Come to think of it, I've never even seen an orange fall from a tree.

"Dammit, John, that nigger was the biggest Jesus freak that high school had ever seen . . ." one of the two male voices boomed into the night. It seemed like the whole neighborhood must have heard him say that, and, consequently, I could sense the whole neighborhood turning an ear to the conversation.

"He wasn't any nigger," *nigguh* is how he said it. "Wendall Norman, now there was a nigger. That nigger brought his lunch to school wrapped in the same old shirt every day."

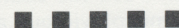
"Naaaaaaw! That Jesus freak was a nigger in capital letters."

I sensed deviation from the conversation on the part of the rest of the neighborhood as well as myself. When the word "nigger" comes up four times in four sentences, the discussion is worthless and tiresome.

So I tune them out.

Prejudice is everywhere. It's on the radio. It's on suburban back porches. It's in the breeze coming from the east. It's in the schools. Prejudice is everywhere, and everywhere, it's time.

*Personally, I think the greatest threat to America today is the way the schools . . .*



It's now 10:23 P.M. I seemed to have dozed off after that person started talking about schools. I don't have any idea what he said about schools, but he didn't sound very intelligent.

While I was asleep, I dreamed. And what a strange dream it was! I was standing alone on a huge field when I started running. I kept running until I reached a huge balcony that overlooked a black emptiness. For some reason, in the dream I knew that I was at the end of the world. Then I said: "So the world isn't round." But no one heard me. Only myself and my God.

The balcony was rather strange. There were faces molded into the floor of the balcony that were those of human faces. When I turned to them, they looked at me despairingly and said: "Leave! Leave! You'll regret staying here. We are not what we appear to be. Leave! Leave!!"

But they were faces of people I didn't know. Then they repeated themselves: "Stay away. We are not what we appear to be. We are not real. We are making a show for you. Stay away from us. We are actors. We are not what we appear to be." All of the faces said this dialog except for one particular face. That face seemed not to care at all what the others were saying, and only looked their way occasionally.

I ran from the balcony and across the field to where I was originally. There was one huge difference, though. There was a huge giant stomping my way. His face, at first hard to see, was that of one of the faces on the balcony; the face that was silent. The giant, however, never came near me, and even seemed to be ignoring me, but the fear of hell went through me when I saw him. I ran off in the opposite direction of the seemingly endless field. Just when I thought I had escaped the giant, his face, huge and clear, emerged out of the sky. It came directly at me with a mouth opened to scream. Sirens, however, were the sounds coming out of his mouth. As the mouth prepared to envelop me, I woke up.

The faces of the people on the balcony and especially of the giant stay in my mind very clearly, and I doubt that I will ever forget them.

It's time. I wish I could consummate the way to say that I don't know what it's time for, but I can't. I just know it's time for something important to happen to me, and it's coming soon.

Those two men are still talking on the neighbor's back porch next door. The conversation has turned from who's a nigger and who isn't to more prime time topics such as who was gay and who wasn't and old girlfriends. I don't know why, but it's things like getting together with old friends and talking about old times that make me dread getting older than I already am. From the way the conversation outside is flowing, I'm almost sure I won't enjoy talking about old times twenty years from now. I have very few friends anyway, so my chances of having old friends in the first place are rather slim. Writers never have any friends.



The hour is fast approaching. It's 11:55 P.M. The cats probably won't come out at exactly twelve, but it should be close.

The five minutes to twelve pass by like a bolt.

The cats emerge. All is silent. The men who were talking outside have long since gone in. I am deaf to the radio. I can see the cats' eyes glimmering under the streetlight that crescendos the sight of the long awaited catfight. The cats prance the street with staccato steps that are soundless. The crickets are silenced again. The neighborhood sleeps. The cats are in the dream that haunts the neighborhood's sleep. It seems an eternity while they race around in circles anticipating and plotting their next maneuver.



At once they stop and stare. "At last we meet again," one of them says. In a fleeting glimpse I see one of them leap from his solitary position and go hurling through the air at his intended victim. I close my eyes and see the sound. I see the sound of claws invading soft fur. I see the sound of pain in the animal kingdom. I see the sound of vicious animals ripping away at each other's very being. I see the sound of one cat running away to his home. The sound stops, and all is silent again. Tonight, sirens wake the night. Tonight, someone has called the police. Tonight, a child has lost her only pet, and she cries into the night, for tonight, a cat lies dead in the middle of the street.

Sirens grow closer. Sirens arrive. I open my eyes. The giant from my dream steps out of flashing automobile and takes charge of the situation. More sirens arrive. Faces from a dream flock around the giant. They are not what they appear to be. The sound of sirens stops. The scene is still lit by the same towering streetlight. No one touches the cat.

"Boss," one of the faces says. "HQ, on the talkie."

The boss holds the C.B. speaker firmly in his hand. "Yeah. What is it?" he says wearily.

Static. Hiss. Noise. "Gotcha!" he says into the speaker, seeming to understand what was said. "All right!" he says to the gathered crowd of sleepwalkers dressed in robes, towels, Mudd, and curlers. "Everybody back inside. That's all the excitement for tonight." He turns to his assistant. "C'mon, Frank, let's clean this mess up."

The group of people reluctantly tapers. Police car engines hum into the night. The cat still lies dead. Moths obscure the light from the streetlight. The boss looks exasperated. He stands away from the rest.

"Hey, boss. The rest of the neighborhood doesn't even know it."

"Yeah. Thanks, Frank."

Frank walks away and the boss is left standing alone again. I hear him say in a soft whisper, as if only himself and his God were to hear him: "Maybe the world isn't round."

Beacons streak across his face at equal intervals. He has seen the pain. Another car arrives, interrupting the silence. Two men get out of the car, faceless and mindless. One carries a large plastic bag, the other, a shovel. The dead animal is shoveled into the bag and the bag is dumped into the trunk of the car. The car drives off into the mysterious night that I have yet to discover. The boss still stands alone with the beacon blessing

his face at equal intervals. The hum of the one remaining car's engine brings the night into tune. Frank sits alone reading a newspaper and puffing a cigar. He grows impatient and finally pulls the cigar out of his mouth and sticks his head out the car window. "Hey! C'mon! Let's get kickin'!"

The boss turns his head slightly, acknowledging the existence of the underpaid assistant to the chief. "I'll be there in a second, Frank. Just hold on."

Frank's head goes back into the window in haste as he presses out his cigar and then takes a swig out of his condensed cup of Coke. He wipes the cool cup across his sweaty forehead and begins breathing more relaxed. His face is nearly invisible in the dark, but his facial characteristics rise out of the darkness of the police car's inside. He is just an ordinary man getting by in a corrupt world, as is the boss.

"BOSS! C'mon! It's time to go . . . c'mon . . . it's time . . . y'know . . . time . . ."

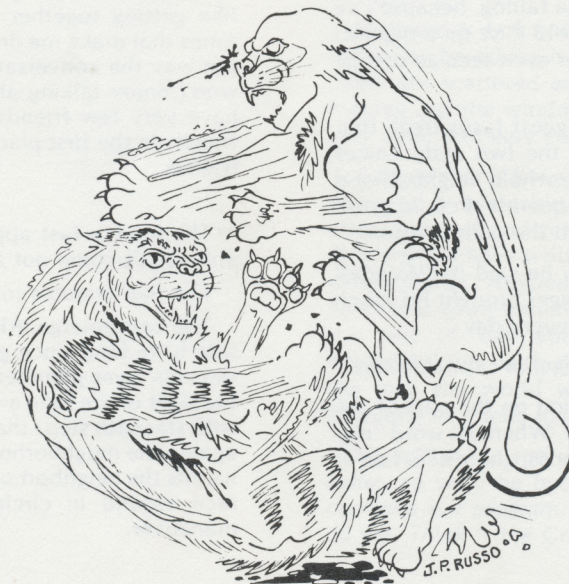
"Yeah," the boss said in a lost tone. His shadow is cast onto the street and is interrupted by the hulking figure of the police car. He stares blankly at the site which the dead cat used to occupy. Blood still remains, the outline of the cat's fallen body. "I'm comin'. I guess it is time."

"Damn right!" Frank says. "Let's blow this joint. I've got better things to do."

The boss slowly and solemnly turns to his car. His slumping head and sagging neck turn before he opens the car door to take one last look at the site of the killing. He gets into his car. It was time, but the time has passed. He has a wife to go home to. He has a family. Frank has better things to do. He also has a family. The boss flips on the radio. It is on 880 AM.

*880 AM radio is a public service of the Griffin Broadcasting Company. 880 AM will now be leaving the broadcast airwaves until 6:00 A.M. this morning. Questions or comments concerning the operation of this station . . .*

The police car disappears and the radio continues in my room. 880 AM will now be signing off until 6:00 A.M. The police car vanishes into the night. Everyone is back in bed. The neighborhood sleeps once again. The nightmare of the catfight woke the night, but, like any other nightmare, people recover and go back to sleep. The fallen orange lies peacefully on the ground. Blood still stains the street. The catfight has relieved me of all anxiety, but I will wake tomorrow and find that it was all a dream. Nothing was real. But I can sleep in comfort now, because there will never be another catfight. ■





# Midnight Love

by Mark Thomas

Each pressing moment  
Dying to know  
Who will come and who will go  
And what love's body you shall bestow

Take the feather from her hair  
And she will fly high  
into the midnight air

And disappear  
like only a cloud would  
as your eyes covet her more

When rains come  
Rolling over fields and  
Tumbling over plains  
Your holy mind will want but not the  
Heaven her soul contains

She is love  
Free as a dove  
Many miles drove  
Over soaked denim  
And feather soft lace  
Holding her torch  
Aflame  
To find her lost  
Truth

She runs the day and the  
Stars dissolve her  
Flesh into the moon  
She knows the way  
to the moon  
and to the

Sea of Tranquility  
The Lake of Dreams  
The Marsh of Sleep  
The Bay of Rainbows

A body so perfect  
Eyes glitter like sequins  
Rhyming with midnight  
True love for the meek ones

Show her no love  
Her eyes will absorb you  
In puddles of passion  
Her heart only true

Leaving behind but a fragment  
Of what she can do  
When love is love, time is time, men are men,  
And she is love

And she disappears into the  
pillow of  
midnight

## to Liz, the reality of a relationship

by Screaming Furniture

cold, black rOom,  
bleak desires — passion thrives.  
alone in my room  
dreaming of you.

Visions of dancing,  
mE the lone partner  
cold, WhItE roof  
dreaming of you.

ALone on my bed  
dreams run free  
reaLity lefT bEHind  
desire for you.

A kiss, a caRess,  
yoUr fleSh in light.  
visions of beAuTy  
wanting you.

sweat becomes odor,  
thoughts of Pillow tAlk  
fill my mind  
loving you.

buRning sensation  
me The lone pArtnEr  
tinGles up my spine  
dreAmIng of you.

now it Is over,  
No chance of rejection  
me the lone partner  
Thoughts of you.

silence

sleep.  
obvious blandishment —  
talk to Me, Liz.



# THE MEDITATION OF A SOLDIER

by Anthony Piazza

In the freshly dug foxhole sat an unharmed soldier. He was quite young and had been thrust into a way of life that he was not accustomed to. His tender skin became dried out and sunburned — a mask of adulthood covering youth at its prime. Because of his sunken eyes and cheeks, he had the appearance of being weak, but under life-threatening situations he could hold his own. His appearance was a product of war's ills. All of his emotions were imprinted on his body. Confusion, hatred, fearfulness, and isolation were present.

He sat glazy-eyed, unaware of his comrade calling for a helping hand in this abusing land. His pleas for help, and wails of terrifying pain could barely be heard over the resounding clamor of battle. The noise of an approaching helicopter along with the upheaval of the dust from the lifeless terrain became a force which violently pushed the dumbfounded soldier into reality. He instinctively grabbed his headgear and weapon to protect himself.

The soldier, ever so slowly, peered over the surrounding ridge of weeds and sandbags. For the briefest moment he saw a glorious sunrise with its visible rays piercing through the thick dust and cascading over the enclosing mountains. The bits of dust shone brightly in the light. Soon the sun hid itself behind the clouds from the torments of war. The awareness of the true condition of war suddenly grasped him when he saw the wounded soldier on the battlefield reaching out with his blood-stained hands towards the safety of the small hole in the ground. Both soldiers reached desperately for each other. Their potential bond was abruptly broken by a string of bullets crossing where their hands might have touched. Shell fragments, rocks, and clusters of dirt erected a barrier between the two.

The wounded fighter's cries were heard by the now-alerted soldier. The injured soldier began to crawl towards the other with his right arm, his only usable limb. As he began his journey, he started to talk to the unharmed soldier, who hadn't left the safety of the hollow due to his overwhelming fear of dying.



"Pull me in, please! I-I-I- can't make it without your help. I'm going to die!"

Death was one thing the unscathed soldier didn't want to inflict on anyone. He grabbed the weakened hand and began to pull. As the disabled soldier grew closer, he began to speak again but this time incoherently.

"Oh mom, thank you for the cookies . . . Can we leave here now? Aunt Peg is too mean . . . Those bullets really hurt me, mom. I didn't even hear them coming. Mom, mom . . .? Where's dad? Did he hear them? Did you?"

The string of bullets returned. They wanted to accomplish their mission, their mission to kill, which had not been fulfilled last time. The bullets ran right across the wounded soldier. His blood splattered across the dry dirt, but it didn't penetrate. The earth rejected the blood.

The weak hand suddenly became strong. The soldier began to breathe heavily and then not at all. The living soldier felt life itself leave the body. He was still pulling at the body, but it wasn't moving.

"And why should it move? Where is it going to go?" he thought to himself.

He finally let go of the lifeless form and sat back down in seclusion.

"What was it that he said? . . . He didn't hear them coming? . . . Yes, 'I didn't even hear them coming.' Who or what is it? Could it be the enemy . . . or maybe the bullets or death?"

His mind wandered, pondering these thoughts, while the man who brought it to his attention lay lifeless above him. The body was a constant reminder.

"Did he hear the bullets this time? Did he hear them! Does anyone hear them? Will I hear them?"

The constant bombardment sent him into a trance. He couldn't tolerate eating any of his canned rations all day. He was so absorbed in the meditation that he didn't hear his orders over the radio, nor did he hear other soldiers calling him.

As the day passed the soldier became increasingly disoriented and confused. The bombing and gunfire never subsided and seemed to close in on him. Feeling both hot and cold simultaneously, he broke into a sweat as he threw off his helmet and flung his gun at the wall. He clenched his fists so tightly they became white at the knuckles and blood seeped through his fists. He thrashed his head back and forth in a fit. The noise became unbearable. The walls of safety seemed to envelop him; he tried to push them away. He began to whimper and tears streamed from his eyes. The tears streaked his dirty face.

"I can't stay here any longer. The walls are closing in on me. They will crush me! I hear them coming. They're after me! Must get out!"

He spotted the hand of the dead soldier hanging over the sandbags above him. Without a second thought he grabbed the lifeless hand and hoisted himself from the suffocating hole. The soldier was in the midst of war. Bullets, bombs, death, and darkness surrounded him. Gunfire came out of nowhere, and it was aimed at the enemy.

The freedom from being in that hole exhilarated him, but he still felt pressure. Without the hole safety was not his. The enemy took aim against a specific target — him. He began to run in a desperate panic. Bullets followed him and safety took on a new form, for in sight was a small wooded area which could provide protection. He raced toward the shelter. Every step he took the bullets followed a millisecond behind.

(continued on page 22)



# Brotherhood

by Philip Tucker, Jr.

Who are you? What are you?  
Why are you here?  
We all have little space on this earth,  
But our purpose seems a little unclear.  
Now I'm going to try very hard  
To explain this as best I can —  
This is my concept and understanding  
Of the word "Brotherhood."  
I will begin with unfair judgment  
And conclude with examining you.  
You see, one problem that we are facing here  
Is what we say but just don't do.  
There are those that say they believe in the Bible.  
The Bible says "judge ye not,"  
But every day man is judged by the color of his skin.  
But this is power that only God's got.  
There are those who will say that they are your friend  
And laugh and grin in your face,  
And the very minute you turn around  
They'll say what you are wearing is out of place.  
There are those that say they'll be behind you  
In any little thing you do.  
When the question is asked, "Who did this thing?"  
They'll point the finger at you.  
When God created each of us,  
He didn't forget our needs;  
He gave us all companionship  
To unite and sow good seeds.  
I am your brother; you are my sister.  
We should come together as one.  
If in unity we do our jobs,  
The quicker we'll get things done.  
Brotherhood is loving, sharing, and holding each other's hand.  
I tell you a house divided against itself  
Is one that will not stand.  
To do good deeds and help one another,  
The very best that you can  
Will create a world of togetherness —  
All else is in God's hand.  
We have to take one step — all else will fall into place.  
This world was created for all mankind,  
Not created for just one race.  
There are no more big I's, no more big U's,  
No more black or white.  
God doesn't look for the color of the skin;  
He looks at the shining of the light.  
God lives behind the sun, and He's shining his light on you.  
Don't worry about who else isn't doing his job —  
You do yours, he'll come through.  
Let's stop saying what we're going to do.  
I've explained this as best I could.  
There is no more excuse, saying you did not know  
The meaning of the word BROTHERHOOD.  
I will now answer the questions I asked you.  
Who are you? Why are you here?  
For some your purpose may not be known;  
My purpose is all quite clear.

# A Cold Morning

by Rodrigo Diaz

The old woman stoops  
To pick up the wood for the heater  
And carries it inside the house alone.  
She lights the rusty device for the boy  
And draws the window curtain  
With her worn, old hand.

In the firelight he sees  
Her eyes as twinkling pools.  
The lines in her face crinkle.  
Her trembling lips whisper  
— mi cariño,  
mi pobre,  
mi principe azul —

He falls asleep  
To a sweet, merry lullaby  
Poor women often sing,  
And she holds him for a long time.

# Tommy's Castle

by Matt Costa

Tommy builds a castle  
With sandy wind-blown walls;  
Protect them all from walking  
His only hallowed halls.

Watch Tommy build his castle  
With moat so deep and wide;  
Don't let the Villain inward  
To wreck what dwells inside.

Now Tommy packs his castle  
So strong, yet gently-tight;  
Must never open up those gates  
For fear they just might fight.

Now plunges down the tidal  
Of force, no one can bear;  
It pulls down Tommy's castle  
And draws away its share.

So Tommy throws a tantrum  
Of flair — a childish fit;  
Then quiets, covers up a blush  
And hides within his pit.

Now Tommy plunges into sand  
His hand — becomes a vassal;  
And goes about his task again —  
Tommy builds a castle.



## MEDITATION (continued from page 20)

He dove into the shrubs. The branches clawed at his face and naked arms. Droplets of blood formed on his face; he appeared to be sweating blood. The soldier's heartbeat and breathing slowly subsided to normal for the moment. A sigh of relief came from the soldier's flushed lips.

"Safety at last. How good it feels to . . . Ahhhhhh!"

A bullet finally caught up with the body. The lead penetrated the skin of the forearm and came right out the other side. His forearm bled spasmodically and the pain was unbearable. He quickly tied a piece of his pant leg about the wound. The pressure felt good and the pain lessened, but the blood didn't stop, as he could see by the saturated green bandage. Due to the sudden loss of a tremendous amount of blood, to not having eaten in days, and to the extreme physical exertion, the soldier became sick to his stomach.

Again he was thrust into a state of panic when he heard an explosion and loud outcries. He scampered through the grove toward the sound. Once out in the open the wounded soldier saw an overturned jeep consumed in fire on the side of a hill adjoining two mountains. This was not far from where he was, so he decided to go over to the area.

The darkness of the night had come quickly, and he was able to travel without being noticed. The fire blazed on, leading the soldier toward it. The journey seemed to last forever. The soldier walked and crawled through bushes and ditches. He stumbled and fell many times on his wounded arm — to the point where the bandage did no good and his arm became numb.

As the soldier came to the end of his travel, he smelled a foul odor. It became stronger and stronger with every step. The smell was horrible. It overwhelmed the soldier. He felt ill again and fell to all fours. He turned very pale and started to sweat. Trying to get to his feet was to no avail. The ill warrior began coughing uncontrollably. He gagged. Every cough forced him to arch his back like a scared black cat. As he arched his back his stomach contracted violently forcing all of his insides up. A mixture of blood, saliva and other juices poured out of his mouth rhythmically. Having no control over his body at all, the man urinated on himself. He collapsed from exhaustion.

The soldier was slowly awakened by the rain falling on his face. As he opened his eyes, he saw gnats flying about. He moved away quickly, and as he turned he saw a large rodent clawing at a body lying on a rock formation. The soldier picked up a large stone and threw it at the animal. The animal ran off, and the stone just bounced off the human body.

The soldier now realized the scope of what had happened the day before at the explosion. There were two bodies present. He wrapped them both up with materials found in the jeep. One seemed to have been thrown out of the jeep and crushed against the rocks. The other soldier had been burned to death and his body was not far from the burnt jeep.

After disposing of the bodies, the soldier made himself a shelter within the rock formation. He found many useful items in and around the jeep, one of which was food, and he consumed it quickly. Near the wreckage he found a medical bag with all types of medication and first-aid material. With it he redressed his wound. The soldier was feeling much better; the rain cleansed him and the food made him stronger.

The rain didn't stop at all. So there was no way of telling what time of day it was. After what seemed like a day, he lay down to sleep but could not as he was extremely worried. He reached into the medical bag and took out a couple of sleeping pills. He

slept all night and most of the day. When he finally woke up, he felt extremely drowsy and took other pills to keep himself up and alert.

"I need to watch out for the enemy. I must stay awake until someone on my side finds me."

The day went on and the gunfire and bombs came closer toward his haven. He began to feel closed in again. The sun shone brightly.

"I-I-I n-n-need to be more alert. Where's . . . Where's my pills? I need something." He was very nervous and edgy.

He ransacked the medical bag and withdrew a montage of articles. Bandages, vials of pills and surgical instruments fell to the dusty ground. A scalpel caught a glint of the sun's rays. The bright reflection caught his attention immediately. The soldier's hand went for the scalpel. He hesitated. The gleam in his eye matched the brightness of the scalpel. His hand began to shake and without stopping he grabbed it. He gripped the scalpel tightly and commenced his terrorism to an invisible enemy. He cut deeply and unmercifully into the air. Throughout the torture he grunted and grinded his teeth viciously.

After the battle the soldier flung the scalpel at the rock wall. The scalpel bounced off the wall of the cave and stabbed the sandy ground.

The soldier turned back to his pills. Walking toward the medical bag, he tripped and landed face down in front of one of the pill containers. He grabbed it immediately and sat up. Trying to open the bottle became a major obstacle for the young soldier. His hands trembled immensely. His face became red and he was frustrated. He took the bottle and threw it desperately at the cave wall. Glass and pills scattered everywhere. The soldier scrambled for the pills on his belly. With his face in the dirt he consumed some of the pills from the ground.

Now calmer, he went back to the bag. While investigating the medical bag the soldier began to talk like a little boy. "One red, one blue . . . Look, here's a new bottle I haven't tried. And another . . . I'm finding a whole bunch of stuff. Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha." His rhythmic laugh was that of a little boy.

A complete change came over him again. He became nervous again. "The enemy? . . . That rodent or the jeep or the woods? Maybe the person shooting at me or . . . or maybe the people who put me here."

The soldier, having taken most of the medication in the bag, ran out of the shelter and started scaling the mountainside. He got to a grassy plateau and stood on the edge and started screaming at the top of his lungs.

The crazed soldier was seen by two soldiers from his troop. They went after him before he would kill himself. As the two soldiers started up the mountainside, they could hear him calling down, "The enemy is coming! Stay away . . . stay away! Here come the enemy . . . I hear them. I can hear them. Wait!"

The two soldiers stood still. They didn't want to upset the soldier above them.

"I can hear the bullets zooming by . . . I can hear the gunfire killing people . . . I can hear death calling for all of life! . . . Enemy . . . can you hear me? To every enemy I give up."

The two soldiers heard nothing. They quickly climbed up to the plateau. There they saw the soldier sitting with his legs crossed and eyes closed, waiting. He sat on the green grass with his green uniform in a state of meditation. ■



Winner of *The Lyre's* Art Competition



# Frankenstein

by Jeff Russo





## A MAN FOR OTHERS

by Matt Costa

Page is wearin' this totally obnoxious tie — the kind that yells out, "Yes, I dare to be an individual" — and it sorta jumps out at me when I walk by him.

"Hey, Stew, how's it goin'?" His blond hair tousled about his forehead, the bits of sweat glistening around his neck, and that undeniable odor infringing upon my airspace tell me he's just come from P.E.

"Pretty good," I say. "How's it with you?"

"How's things with Brenda?"

Jesus Christ, I hate when people ask questions without even answering yours. It's as if they could care less how you responded to them — like someone patented some sorta staged format of small talk and good old Page is infringin' on the copyright.

"Fine," I say, with that voluptuous smile of mine. "We—"

"Oh, I gotta run," he says, like he studied hard for his little role, delivered his lines, and now has to exit stage left.

"Can't keep Supershlomg waiting, you know."

Believe me, Page, I know. Who needs you, anyway? You could've at least had the decency to flip on some roll-on after the football game.

The classroom's already half-full when I get in, and the first things that grab my attention are the schematic diagrams Mr. Tourette has so meticulously sketched on the blackboard. He's standing behind his desk, talking to a student from the previous class. Tourette's kinda excited about what he's saying, and his arms are pumping out gestures like he's just swallowed half a bottle of speed.

Oh, Jeez, how can I take another day in Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood — it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a beautiful day in the neighborhood? I mosey on over to my seat, which, by chance, happens to be the last seat in the last row of my last class of the day. Cretin's beside me, carefully tearing his graded homework (for which, of course, he got a hundred) into vertical slices for papyral warfare. Well, maybe I won't fall asleep today . . . not as long as I have Cretin's loud-mouthed idiocy to keep me entertained.

"Well, kids," starts Mr. Tourette — always starting exactly ten seconds before the bell . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . there it is — "today we're going to study the equilateral triangle. As we all know a triangle has — how many sides?"

Naptime. Well, at least Mathematics books make adequate classroom pillows.

"Burp!" Oh, Jeez, I hope he didn't hear me. Six cups of flat Coke have this sorta disrupting effect on my digestive tract. Yes, Stew, you definitely should have eaten off-campus today.

Bushleague! Jimmy's wearin' argyles! And I thought Jim'd never turn preppie. Next thing you know, they'll be askin' him to be on Burdines' Teen Board. He's even turned in his topsiders for a pair of those classy Cubano shoes.

My own topsiders are split. Well, at least the right one is. Screwed 'em up in P.E. yesterday. It was fourth-and-two, on the fifty-yard line, last play of the game. We had no other alternative, so Rigley sent me down the field for a long bomb. And I, reaching new heights in wide receiver excellence, am shoe-string tackled by one of those stupid parking poles that resemble sawed-off pogo sticks. There I am, on the ground wailing in pain, holding my right foot which I just smashed into this sad excuse for a parking picket, and all Coach I.Q. can say is that he hadn't noticed I forgot to bring my tennis shoes to class. My poor topsiders. Goddamn poles! If someone'd give me a shovel and two cents, I swear I'd dig every single one of those spikes outta the ground. I mean, what possible benefit could those stupid poles offer? Maybe they were meant to be used as crucifyin' posts for those frogs we sacrificed — pardon me, dissected — in Anatomy. Or maybe they're memorial spikes for every Jesuit alumnus that couldn't cut it out of state and had to finish his four years at good old "Harvard" Community College. In any case, they're certainly of no use to me. I guess the administration found it necessary to line the parking lot of an all-boys school with two-feet-high phallic symbols.

Actually, if the gym had been open, we wouldn't even have been playing football in the lot. But, no, some idiot had to coat the ceilings with asbestos twenty years ago, and now we have to scrape it off the insides. (Such brilliant foresight should not go unpunished.) My poor topsiders. Goddamn poles! Anyway, the excruciatin' pain on my big toe eventually faded away (though it left a huge bruise there), but the rip in my right topsider's still there. I guess you could say that if it wasn't for the asbestos, my topsiders would be as good as new. (I can imagine what that stuff does to your lungs.)



Oh, God, somebody cut the cheese. Whoa! It's almost unbearable. It's gotta be Jasmine. He's got a silly smirk on his face. Why can't he belch it like a man instead of passin' it like a wuss?

Walk's missin'. I hadn't noticed his seat was empty 'til now. Oh, yeah, that's right. Today he's serving I.S. I'll give him credit, though — he's got guts. Who'd've thought within that tiny, little cranium exists the electronic genius of Dolly Madison? Just for the hell of it, Walker crossed a couple wires in Herbert's golf cart. It was funny when Herbert popped Der Hindenburg into forward and it flew uncontrollably back in reverse. It was even funnier when the cart went backwards down the steps in the courtyard. It was especially funny when Herbert realized he had lost control and gave out a shocked expression as if he had just wet his pants. But it wasn't funny when the cart crashed smack through the doors of Building Two. And it wasn't funny when it took a work crew of four men an hour and a half to dislodge the cart from the entrance.

It was the perfect crime — or almost was . . . if it wasn't for Cretin. That A-hole spied Walker tinkering with Der Hindenburg and couldn't wait to tell Pac-man. And so, Walk's got I.S. today. If I only had one shot at Cretin, I swear I'd nail him. They'd probably make me a national hero or somethin' — Stew Tautle . . . example for all . . . a man for others.

Oh my God! Look at Sibling, writing on his notebook again — Lucille . . . Lucille . . . I love Lucille . . . Lucille . . . Lucille . . . Lucille—give it up, Sibling. Last week it was Cathy, and the week before, Val. If you keep this up, we're gonna have to buy you a whole new notebook. Someone oughtta warn him about those Academy girls — they're hazardous to your health. (They're worse than asbestos.) They try to dominate you, ya' know. Make you pick them up, take them to their dances, pay for their tickets — for cryin' out loud, if they don't out-and-out rob a guy of his manhood. If I had the time, I'd give old Sibling a couple lessons in pride and what it means to be a man. If I could, I'd catch him like that Holden Caulfield dude did, sit him on my lap and say, "Hey, son, you just don't know what you're getting into. Women is nothing but trouble. They always get their way: 'Take me here . . . take me there . . . buy me that . . . don't touch me there!'" Real men need women like Jesuit needs poles in the ground. That's it! That's what those poles are for — impalin' Academy girls on!

Maybe someday he'll learn. Someday when he's grown-up, he'll say, "Jeez, how stupid could I have been?" Then he'll —

"Stuart, x equals — what?" Oh God, not now.

"Ah . . ." oh, it's on the board, "three."

"Right, then we plug that answer . . ." This guy is unbelievably simple . . . so simple, it makes me wanna vomit. The kids on Romper Room got it tougher! He's a nice guy and everything, but he treats us too much like little kids. Sure, half the class loves his simplicity now, but what's gonna happen when we get into some Calculus course in college? We're gonna get eaten alive. This class needs some discipline. He needs some respect for his students' academic abilities. Tourette's givin' me the cold stare like he knows what I'm thinkin'. What this class needs is more of a challenge. The students need to be treated more like adults — not children. Someone's gotta tell him. For the good of the class, some brave guy's gotta step forward and say, "No! We're not two-year-olds!" If the two of us could just have a man-to-man talk, I'm sure he'd see it my way.

Oh, Jeez, Cretin, what the hell do you think you're doin' with that wad of paper? No, Cretin, no . . . not while he's facing the board — okay . . . okay, Cretin, I hope you get your ass burned. What an immature little bastard. Wonder if he'll ever grow up.

Wow, Cretin, what a shot! I didn't think the little wimp had it in 'em. And look at that — it's still sticking to Tourette's jacket.

"Stuart," Oh, Christ! It wasn't me. "Do you find this amusing?"

Damn straight, I do.

"Ah . . . no, sir," I say.

Whew, that was close! Saved by the bell.

"Stuart, where do you think you're going? I'd like to have a word with you." Bogus, man! I didn't do diddly. Something tells me this ain't such a beautiful day in the neighborhood. Isn't such a good time for that man-to-man talk, either.

"What's wrong with you, Stuart? I've checked you out. You have a fine reputation at this school — good grades . . . high SAT math — is Calculus getting too difficult for you to grasp? Too confusing?" Are you kidding? Don't make me laugh. "Now, little tricks like this have got to stop." Bum rap! It wasn't me — it was Cretin. "You're distracting my class." Ha! You're distracting your class, Tourette. "Now, you better straighten up, son." Oh my God, gimme a break.

"Mr Tourette, sir, it wasn't me," I say.

"Yeah, right. Then who was it?"

"It was . . . it was . . ." Cretin, you son of a bitch! "I didn't see who it was."

"Yeah, sure. You better run, Stuart, before you're late for your next class."

"Yes, sir." Jeez, Cretin's lucky I'm the compassionate type.

Cyrus's at his locker, and I have to laugh 'cause he's just dropped all his books. His tie's hangin' at half-mast ('guess that's for the dead in Beirut or somethin'), and both his shoes are untied. "Hey, Cy, what 'cha up to?"

"Nothin' much," he says, bending over the whole pack of Theology hand-outs that have spilt over the floor — "Nuclear War and Its Effects on Russian Shoestring Production" — haven't got that one yet. Humph! Looks like good subversive material. "Heard you and Brenda are getting back together." Cy says.

Damn! The hole's gettin' bigger. Goddamn poles!

"Yeah," I say "it sorta looks that way."

"Are you still gonna go to the Police with me next Saturday?"

"Can't. Academy's Prom is that night. I feel kinda obligated to go."

"You'd pick Brenda over the Police?" Forget to shave this morning, Cy? Pac-man's gonna nail 'ya. "I suppose its gonna burn a hole in your pocket, too," Cy says.

"Naw, it'll be okay," I say.

"Well, maybe next year." Cy picks up the rest of his books and papers with one sweep of his arms, and crunches everything into his locker. What a messy bastard! "Gotta run, Stew. Harvard rep's on campus today." It's hard to believe that that guy's third in the class. "Take it easy, Stew."

"Yeah," I say, "catch 'ya later, Cy." Catch ya later. ■

*The characters, setting, and plot depicted in this story are purely fictitious.*

*Any similarities between a character and an actual person are purely coincidental.*

*Any malevolent remarks made by the narrator are meant to reflect his general disposition and attitude portraying an overestablished competitiveness, outrageous obnoxiousness, and arrogant hypocrisy. They are not meant to be insults to any one individual, organization, or administration.*



# VITAL SIGNS

by Joel R. Rey

It was a cold and dreary January night in New York City. Just across Long Island Sound in Ossining, New York, stood the threatening monument to crime and human suffering—Sing Sing Prison. The imposing walls encircling the prison seemed to glow as they reflected the silvery light from the full moon into the night's darkness. The tolling of a church bell could be heard in the distance. It was now midnight, an hour after the final cell check of the night.

Johnny Desmond sat quietly on his bed staring at the far wall of his cell which was divided into neat rectangles by the shadows from the bars in the window. He could hear the snoring in nearby cells. He wished he could be asleep, but he knew that his plans for that night would prevent any rest. How long would it take for the guards to find the mess he left in the laundry room, he wondered? The guards always checked to make sure he left it spotless. What was taking so long?

Johnny's mind wandered. He thought about his parents, his crime, his life imprisonment term. A tear trickled down his cheek as he reminisced about his childhood. He remembered how his father died in an automobile accident when Johnny was only six years old. Why did it have to happen? If his father hadn't died, his mother would never have remarried. His beer-guzzling stepfather was the reason for his mother's nervous breakdown and eventual suicide when Johnny was thirteen. How he hated that ogre! The next six years after his mother's death were sheer hell for Johnny. His stepfather was always abusing him. When Johnny was nineteen he finally ran away. He married his long-time girlfriend, Roxanne Bristol, and left Terra Haute, Indiana, for the glamour and nightlife of New York City.

A roach scurrying across the floor brought Johnny out of his pensiveness for a moment. Listening for the guards, he heard nothing and returned to his quiet reflection. He remembered how he was bringing in enough money for the rats to live on by working as a janitor. He hadn't cared if Roxanne worked to supplement their income, but why did she have to prostitute herself? Johnny hadn't known why she had been so secretive about her job until he came home early from work one night and found Roxanne in bed with a customer. After all the pain and pressures he sustained as a child, his mind finally snapped. Surely he couldn't be blamed for shooting his prostitute-wife and an amorous bank president who liked cheap flesh . . .

"Desmond, you dirty sonuvabitch! There's water all over the laundry room floor! Wake up, 'cause you're gonna clean it, now!"

"Huh?" Surprised by the outburst of the guard, Johnny sprang up from his bed and stood dumbfounded before the cell door.

"You heard me! Now let's go, and you'd better be quick about it!"

The guard let Johnny out of the cell and led him down the gray corridor to the laundry room. The guard opened the laundry room door and shoved Johnny inside.

"Hurry up! You got ten minutes!"

"Yeh, okay."

Johnny had already served three years in prison, and two of those years he spent working in the laundry room and planning his escape. Earlier that day while washing clothes, Johnny had disconnected a few pipes so water would leak onto the laundry room floor. He knew the guards would find it and make him clean up the mess. When he was left alone he would attempt his escape. Now was his chance. Johnny found the makeshift ladder he made from towels in its hiding place behind a washer, and he proceeded to climb through the air-conditioning vent whose ventilator shaft led to the courtyard.

Ten minutes elapsed and the guard entered the laundry room. He saw the open vent and ran out to inform the warden of Desmond's escape.

Johnny reached the end of the shaft and exited through another vent. He was now in the dark courtyard about fifty yards from the outer wall. Suddenly, the eerie silence that had pervaded the air seconds before was now broken by the howling of the alarm that had just sprung to life. Guards scurried in all directions. The darkness lingering around the prison was driven away by seachlights and flashlights as the search for the missing prisoner began. Johnny waited for some of the commotion to die down. He then carefully avoided the guards and searchlights as he made his way to the fence. Once there, he flung the metal hook attached to his ladder up to the top of the wall. It caught on the edge and held fast as Johnny easily made it over to the outside.

No longer confined, he headed for nearby Rennie's Auto Sales where he hotwired a black '78 Trans Am and sped off to New York City. Surely, he thought, his buddies there would help him.

Unfortunately for Johnny, some guards searching the outer perimeter of the prison spotted him in the car and informed the New York City Police of the escaped prisoner and the vehicle. After a forty-minute drive, Johnny reached the city limits and found two squad cars waiting for him. The police gave chase, but since it had been snowing all day and the ice on the roads made it difficult to control the cars, they couldn't catch Johnny. Just as Johnny attempted a quick turn onto 9th Street, he skidded into a light post and was forced to leave his car and proceed on foot. The squad cars were still giving chase. Johnny saw a prison van coming from the opposite direction. He noticed an alley across the street, and he made a break for it.



Running towards the alley, Johnny saw a doorway at the far end that he knew had to lead to his escape—his freedom. His head hurt and he had flashbacks of Roxanne, the banker, all the blood . . . Almost there, he thought. Suddenly, as he turned the corner to dash into the alley . . . "Freeze, Desmond!" . . . shots dispelled the silence of the empty street. Johnny felt a burning spread through his chest. He looked back as he fell to the ground and saw a thin stream of smoke rising from the barrel of a police officer's .38. He felt his heart beating faster and adrenalin suddenly surged through his body. He saw his blood stain the snow crimson, but he wouldn't be stopped.

Johnny's desire to be free was greater than ever now. "Justice" had given him the raw deal, and he longed for reparation. He wasn't going back to that stinking hell-hole called Sing Sing. He didn't deserve to rot there. After all, it was his wife who sinned. He just taught her a lesson. Her corpse should be locked up. He was only upholding the Ten Commandments. Mother . . . Father . . . they had said to follow the commandments. They did, and they were free now. Freedom, that's what he longed for. His mind raced through the justifications of his actions. He felt fate owed him this freedom to make up for his parents' deaths, his stepfather's beatings, his wife's prostitution. He knew he'd have to get this freedom himself.

Johnny got up and began to run. He now noticed the doorway was open and white light was pouring from it. The light was

brilliant, but the alley seemed darker. The further Johnny ran, the more distant the door seemed. He heard sirens, but they were fading away. They were soon replaced by a beeping sound that rang loudly in his head. It reminded him of the sound made by the electrocardiogram machines used in hospitals. He disregarded the beeping and ran faster.

Now Johnny imagined seeing a red, fluorescent ball jumping in time with the beeping. Was he going crazy? He noticed that both were keeping perfect time with his heartbeat. Johnny grew afraid and made a mad dash for the doorway—his refuge. Every step Johnny took caused his heartbeat to weaken, the alley to darken, and the light to become whiter.

Now Johnny no longer heard police chasing him, the doorway no longer existed, and he was enveloped in white. The beeping, the red dot, and his heart rate still burned in his head, but with less intensity now . . . they seemed to be fading until . . . they stopped.

Johnny could no longer run; there was no alley. Johnny felt as if he were floating, and all he could see now was a bright, white hospital room, a doctor telling the warden that Johnny Desmond was dead, his corpse lying on an operating table below him, and an electrocardiogram machine whose screen was registering no vital signs. ■

## Green Flower of Life

by Brian Donnelly

Green flower of life  
that is both loved and loathed  
Is the fruit of life  
yet many go hungry.

Father, nurse thy child  
with your greedy mind.  
Mother, nurse thy child  
for in its fruition will be  
your recompense.

Grow, like the green flower,  
came over the line  
and through the mail,  
but the boy could not understand  
what the father was saying.

The flower flourished  
but the child did not.  
Talents lie under a blanket of green.  
Golden boy —  
thoughts of Oedipus on his mind.

You are no father, George Washington,  
nor can you buy a son.  
Plenty makes the boy hungry.  
Abraham returns to the altar.



# Make it Live

by Mark Thomas

Just south of midnight  
A melody is moving me  
Requiems ring with power in my being  
On the border of morning I'm feeling free  
Wings of Wisdom are taking my hands to  
Teach me what none know  
Choruses shake my bones  
I hope the singing never stops  
I could be the soloist here  
But the sun shines too bright and the  
Quavers reach too far  
Preparing to run am I  
On the feet of an opera or the soul of a symphony  
Or on the wings of Wisdom

## Old

by Michael Comiskey

Old is shaking deeply as its young prepare for sorry  
And for dying which looks slower ever slower than all life.  
Like life before which travelled quickly and at last  
it started slowly  
So the sorry which we quickly dreaded does not come.

Now the young tearlessly lift the old's shroud hoping praying  
To see electric static jumping life all once again.  
Then some are always wanting movement but are  
always seeing clearer  
All the living that those hoping praying never bring.

And so now death subsides to day all silence lying broken  
And the wind comes running sweeping all the broken old away.  
Some say God is travelled quickly only now is started slowly  
And like the sorry which we quickly dreaded does not come.

But God is really youthful not the old which shakes so deeply  
And is dying which looks slower ever slower than all life.  
And God is come so singing singing with electric static  
Jumping life all once again from under killing shrouds of old.



# A FEW THOUGHTS ON SADNESS (for Abuela)

by Rodrigo Diaz

A mother forever incapable of bearing her own children feels her face fluster and her eyes swell with tears as she sees her adopted son's face through the glow of birthday candles, the entire family gathered around to celebrate his first birthday. An old woman searching through a forgotten trunk grows weepy upon finding a copy of "Moonlight Serenade," her deceased husband's favorite song. In both instances we see behavior associated with that singularly human aspect of our lives: sadness. Undoubtedly such circumstances are universally familiar. When we read of the sterile mother and the reflective woman, we do not simply understand their reactions; we relate to them as experiences comparable to our own. We realize that sadness is a commonly shared reality.

Must there be an essential form of sadness in one's life? Many Americans would probably respond negatively to that query. An idea deeply imbued in our culture is the shame of failure, weakness, and distress. Problems are matters to be overcome. They affect an upright man only as obstacles in his path; one learns nothing from them save how to surmount even greater difficulties. In confronting any problem, resolution and stamina are the psychologically healthy as well as morally sound means to employ. To be weak is evidence of immaturity. To experience distress and doubt is to reveal a troubled mind. In the realm of religion, many would agree with the Reverend Jerry Falwell's statement that "Jesus loves a winner."

I would differ with the above formulations. I contend that sadness must be an essential part of human experience if one is to remain true to one's deepest and most obscure desires and callings. Sadness affords human beings a potentially beneficial psychic environment for spiritual growth and insight into the human soul. The emotions and thoughts, each possessing its own shade of temperament and degree of intellectual sincerity with oneself and uniting to compose the mosaic of sadness, can reveal an image which is a true representation of spiritual yearnings.

Perhaps the most enduring demonstration of sadness as an essential path to spiritual knowledge is the myth of Pandora's Box. In the myth the gods bestow upon Pandora, a selfish and arrogant woman who harbors an irresistible curiosity, a box which they admonish her never to open. Unsurprisingly, she yields to her nature and opens the box, releasing a multitude of demons whose names are Hate, Greed, Envy, and others much worse. They sting and torment her and then escape from her to wreak havoc upon the world. Alone and hurt, she hears a solitary voice calling to her from the open box. It is the call of Hope who stays with Pandora to nurse her and console her in her sorrow.

Like Pandora many of us live lives of egotism and pride, perhaps hidden from our conscious awareness but present nonetheless in the assumptions and means we use to survive and cope with ourselves. We are blinded like Pandora by our self-concern, and eventually, inexorably we follow her down the path to suffering. Only when our ways of life are undeniably revealed as leading to disaster and unhappiness, when we are deprived of our delusions and self-serving explanations, can we hear the soft cry of hope, small but persistent and calling us to the truths which lay ignored under our self-deceit. Only in the stern and unmerciful light of sadness can we gain the illumination essential to penetrate the darkness of foolish arrogance and reveal our inner truths. ■



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